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To: <NPAC-MEMBERS@TALK2.SEATTLE.GOV>
Date: 4/20/2009 11:50 PM
Subject: [NPAC-MEMBERS] RESPONSE TO Outreach Subcommittee Letter to NPAC

Dear Outreach Committee & NPAC members,

I've had the opportunity to speak at length with Kate and Judith about the Outreach Committee's letter but not before the letter became an unexpected discussion item on 4-16 in a meeting with Lyle Bicknell, Sebhat Tenna and Ray Gastil. The tenor of the letter again exposed a resurgent tension, and no little frustration on the part of all parties for different reasons. The staff was visibly upset by what they characterized an unfair mistrust of their actions by NPAC members and our failure to acknowledge when they have acted on NPAC's advice.

Similarly the Outreach Committee is also frustrated by what they perceive to be a lack of responsiveness on the part of city staff to some specific recommendations concerning outreach activities and requests for particular information. There is also a general anxiety about the pace of the planned activities, at least for the initial 3 station area neighborhoods; a belief that NPAC cannot have a meaningful role guiding a process that was essentially fully formed before NPAC member's advice was sought; and a frustration that outreach activities to date have missed some obvious stakeholders despite this being a huge focus area for DON.

Having spoken with Kate and Judith, I also believe that the letter did not convey one important and intended message. Outreach committee members recognize that Lyle, Sebhat and others are operating at a furious pace to meet the deadlines in the Ordinance. There is plenty of debate about the logic of the December deadline, but it's in the ordinance and only the City Council can change it.

What can we do to resolve these differences and enable NPAC to offer effective, constructive guidance at the appropriate time?

To answer that question for myself I re-read Ordinance 122799 and Reso 31085; the updated version of the committee's Proposed Priority Outreach Actions document and two documents prepared by DON and shared with the Outreach Committee in Feb (?) – "Draft Public Involvement Program" and "Neighborhood Plan Update Outreach Plan for under or non-represented Southeast Seattle"

Offered below is my assessment of the issues/questions raised in the Committee's letter and actions to take. This is offered to help guide discussion tomorrow at NPAC.

Issue A: Is the method of outreach and the conduct of workshops revealing and recording the complete, accurate opinions of citizen-participants or is there some bias being introduced by the nature of the questions, the use of city staff as facilitators (authority figures) and the engagement of any Planning Outreach Liaisons whose employment status could affect their objectivity?

Action: 1) Allow NPAC sufficient time to comment on future questions used in surveys (on line) or used to shape discussion in future public meetings. 2) Use citizens as discussion facilitators where volunteers are available and 3) Prepare and share a list of NPAC and POL members w/ very short bios that include employment status. 4) Provide summary of the information that POLs are learning through their outreach activities for NPAC's information and benefit. 5) Allow NPAC to see the Powerpoint show and other materials used to train POLs and used by them in their outreach efforts. 6) Invite POLs to attend NPAC meetings if they wish and provide time on agenda at their request.

Issue B: Is NPAC interpreting its responsibility too broadly and not distinguishing between offering recommendations and giving prior approval of specific staff work products and methods?

Action: 1) NPAC committee should focus “forward” and prepare recommendations that have broad implications e.g., on the structure of the Sector Open House/Status Report events, defining what should be in a Plan Update, how the A&A matrices should be treated, what criteria should be used to prioritize future plan updates, what a validation process should be for plan updates, and how plan updates will be conducted (by volunteers with consultants, using city staff, a mix, other), how to keep track of plan implementation. 2) DON/DPD should provide NPAC with reasonable opportunities to weigh in on the themes and timing of major outreach publicity items before they are mailed or posted to a broad audience. 3) DON/DPD should provide NPAC with the written plan before the May meeting for the line item in the schedule “public feedback on plan updates” during the months of June – September for the three SE transit neighborhood plans to allow for timely recommendations by NPAC on ways to improve outreach and validation.

Issue C: Are the current outreach and publicity efforts missing or ignoring any parties who should be involved? Is mailing postcards to carrier routes within urban villages + 300 feet sufficient?

Action: DON should request NPAC member assistance in identifying “missing persons and missing groups” by providing for review the most up to date outreach lists used by DON and DPD for notifying the public of Neighborhood Planning and Comprehensive Plan related events/actions. DON should make special efforts to contact former members of stewardship groups and neighborhood planning participants, those who participated in SE station area planning, and incorporating lists maintained by the DON District coordinators. To the extent possible, the process of updating neighborhood plans should be use to increase the number of names on the community contacts mailing list and include relevant lists held by Parks, SDOT, SPU, SCL and other agencies with community contact.

Issue D: Are the DPD maps and graphics to be used in upcoming meetings sufficiently illustrative of the potential changes in land use, zoning, building height and type so that citizens can reasonably visualize the impacts of recommended changes in patterns of development?

Action: DPD should use 3-D modeling effects to provide graphics that show relative height, bulk and scale impacts of build-out conditions under existing and any proposed zone changes. Ideally DPD should “test drive” some of the graphic on NPAC committee members to see if they communicate to the general public.

Irene Wall